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## Thanatourism, Caminata Nocturna, and the Complex Geopolitics of Mexico's Parque EcoAlberto

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### Abstract

This article provides readers with a critical analysis of Mexico's Parque EcoAlberto. Utilizing some of the theoretical work of interdisciplinary scholars who are interested in the study of "thanatourism," the authors illustrate how this park, with its Caminata Nocturna (night hike), is much more than simply a "dark" tourist attraction that deters those who might travel North to the U.S. border. This study shows how the indigenous Hñähñú in Mexico have to confront a host of symbolic and material forces that are sometimes hidden in the patriotic metanarratives that swirl around this park.

El Alberto, Hidalgo, Mexico, is home to Parque EcoAlberto, an ecological conservation park operated by the Hñähñú community (often referred to as Otomíes, though they self-identify as Hñähñú). This park is best known among tourists for its weekly attraction, La Caminata Nocturna, or nocturnal hike, that takes place every Saturday night.<sup>1</sup> La Caminata Nocturna is a simulation of an unsanctioned border crossing and provides visitors with an example of what René Girard calls "mimetic violence," in which rituals are used as substitutional acts that cut down on the chances of experiencing "real" violence in the world.<sup>2</sup> Participants in this interactive installation pay the price of about US\$20 and get to experience the difficulties associated with the dangerous trek theoretically by completing an intricate

and didactic obstacle course. In many ways, tourists are supposed to get the opportunity to think about what Nancy Scheper-Hughes labeled “everyday violence.”<sup>3</sup>

The tourists who visit the Parque EcoAlberto play the role of migrants, while members of the local community play the various roles of *narco*, *coyote* (smuggler), *cholo* (thug), *migra* (border agent), or rancher that one might encounter while crossing into the United States. These characters then interact in ways that depict the danger, exploitation, abuse, and corruption that warn would-be migrants in the attempt to discourage them from migrating. Several of the creators and actors in the simulacrum have made the dangerous trek; they have lived *illegally* in the United States, and now they dedicate their time to La Caminata Nocturna. As far as we are concerned, one of the key issues is whether this park is also serving as another variant of what Erika Robb and others call dark tourism, where “mimesis is omnipresent” and the “tourists themselves act out or replicate the original violence” in problematic ways.<sup>4</sup>

This article is written from the perspective of three critical communication scholars who are interested in unraveling and deconstructing mundane notions of freedom and liberty. Such a project requires looking into that which stands in the shadow or in the negative space of freedom: oppression, silence, erasure, abuse, enslavement, confinement, and unfreedom. We agree with Professor Robb when she contends that there are times when “dark tourism destinations” may elicit tensions involving competing notions of “social justice and the consumption of violence” that “may also undermine the witnessing project that some forms of dark tourism claim to offer.”<sup>5</sup>

In this particular article, we intend to provide readers with a critical cultural study of Parque EcoAlberto as a way of explaining just why some thanatourist sites may indeed be sending out problematic messages. More specifically, we will provide an ideological critique of Parque EcoAlberto as a way of explaining why those who defend or attack this park, from conservative U.S. media concerned with a porous border to progressive Mexican media that interpret the park as a way to help indigenous communities overcome poverty, may be missing some of the complexities of immigration and migration contexts.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, we will defend the heuristic value of thanatopolitical (the politics of death) studies of key tourist attractions as we unpack some of the rhetorical dimensions of Parque EcoAlberto.

Parque EcoAlberto serves as a prime example of the complexities of freedom and liberty in the contemporary age of free trade, global markets, diasporas, and human migrations. One of the authors of this piece was in El Alberto, Hidalgo, Mexico, on August 2 and 3, 2014, and participated in La Caminata Nocturna.<sup>7</sup> Following Britta Knudsen’s suggestion that critics need to adopt experiential studies of site-specific locations<sup>8</sup> as well as discursive studies of those places, we offer readers a multimodal study that attends to both the performative as well as the rhetorical features of Parque EcoAlberto.

A thanatopolitical study of Caminata Nocturna reveals how those who work at the park are taking advantage of nationalistic and cultural sentiments as they put on performances that *selectively represent* both the choices and the constraints that stand in the way of thousands of Mexican and Central American border crossers. The theatrics in the park, and all of this mimetic violence, take advantage of essentialist notions of what it means to be a

patriotic Mexican citizen or a caring international cosmopolitan visitor, and those who enter this imaginary world get a truncated view of migration issues. At the same time, a critical cultural analysis of this park reveals that the Hñähñú, in spite of their employment at this facility, continue to face ostracism as this “contact zone” forces them to face all types of discriminatory practices.<sup>9</sup>

Our critical cultural critique of the Caminata Nocturna at the Parque EcoAlberto begins with an overview of the theoretical importance of thanatopolitical studies, and then we provide readers with a brief contextualization that explains the motivations of those who built this park. This is followed by a segment that treats a typical “night walk” as a social text, and we augment this with a following portion that supplies contextual material on the polysemic press reactions to this place. Finally, in the conclusion, we elaborate on the theoretical and practical importance of this investigation.

### **The Heuristic Value of Thanatourist Studies**

In recent years, a growing number of scholars have taken an interest in the study of what some call “thanatourism.” As Philip Stone noted, the study of the nexus that exists between tourism and death, disasters, and atrocities seems to be coming at a time when visitors are provided with “potentially spiritual journeys” as they “gaze upon real and recreated” sites of death.<sup>10</sup> He goes on to explain that, while some of this is “seemingly macabre,” this has not dissuaded visitors from touring former battlefields in northern France, visiting Ground Zero in New York City, sightseeing in the ruins of New Orleans, or traveling to see the sites of mass murders and tragedy in places like the infamous killing fields of Cambodia or Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>11</sup> As Emma Willis noted in 2014, there are even those who travel to Vietnam so that they wiggle through the Cu Chi tunnels that were used by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War.<sup>12</sup>

Michel Foucault is often given credit for helping inaugurate the study of dark tourism when he used the term “thanatopolitics” as he fleshed out various rhetorical features of his conceptualization of biopolitics.<sup>13</sup> In one of his famous lectures, Foucault argued that thanatopolitical arguments were deployed by empowered state actors who wanted to mobilize entire populations “for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity.”<sup>14</sup> This morbid, yet insightful, way of looking at some of the horrific origins of death studies helps account for some of the hermeneutics of suspicion that shadows dark tourist studies which are often characterized as lurid inquiries. Britta Timm Knudsen, in her “Thanatourism: Witnessing Difficult Pasts,” gets at some of this when she remarked that one of the general criticisms of death studies had to do with problematic gazes that conflate understanding and behavior. She elaborated by noting that the “stereotyped war zone tourist is seeking a thrill and a personal experience at the expense of the afflicted other,” where someone was “using the other as a stage prop with the adventurous aim of feeling alive.”<sup>15</sup> Self-reflexivity is key here, and we agree with Erika Robb’s point that tourist “behaviors are also influenced by perceptions about the legitimacy of the violence being presented” at thanatourism sites.<sup>16</sup>

While some researchers argue that this phantasmagoria is voyeuristic and hardly edifying, others contend that thanatopolitics is now a fact of life and needs to be taken seriously.<sup>17</sup> Joan Faber McAlister, for example, in her study of the Women's Jail Museum in Johannesburg, argues that communication scholars who care about the power of the "idealized gaze of visual and memorial culture" at tourist sites need to attend to the "ideological functions of images" that can "reinscribe hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality," while they study intimacy as well as distancing.<sup>18</sup> In other words, recognizing the fact that some horrific or nefarious acts may be linked to lurid origination tales or tourist sites has not prevented the academic legitimation of dark tourist studies. By 2013, Mona Friedrich and Tony Johnston could confidently explain that "thanatourism" was a referential term that was used by scholars to "denote travel to sites motivated by a desire to encounter death or disaster."<sup>19</sup>

Since at least the mid-1990s, some social scientists and humanists have continued to defend dark tourist studies while they mapped out some of the micro- or macrofeatures of thanatopolitics. In 1996, for example, Professor Seaton investigated some of the attitudes and interests of those who were involved in this activity when he explained that dark tourism involved "travel to a location wholly, or partially motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death."<sup>20</sup> Other researchers have broadened the definition of thanatourism to include all types of dark tourist travel, regardless of motivation, and they have come up with multiple examples of places where these symbolic and material encounters can take place. For example, a broader approach to the study of thanatourism would include visits to internment or concentration camps, cenotaphs, graveyards, catacombs, wax works, museums, and war memorials. Peter Slade is one of those who avers that "re-enactments" are also a part of this growing interest in thanatopolitics.<sup>21</sup>

Stuart Murray has invited us to concentrate on studying the technical aspects of death as well as the media mobilization that influences how communities debate about various representations of death,<sup>22</sup> and other writers have also suggested that we can focus on the economic and class dimensions of these controversial tourist attractions. Lennon and Foley, for example, in their *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (2000) pay attention to the specular and the spectacular, the "horror and death" that "have become established commodities," that are put "on sale to tourists who have an enduring appetite for the darkest elements of human history."<sup>23</sup> Thomas Blom, in his study of what he calls "morbid tourism," characterizes all of this interest in darkness as a "postmodern market niche."<sup>24</sup>

Another strand of dark tourist theorizing attends to the heterotopic usages of architectural wonders, monuments, museums, archives, and other topographical spaces that can be juxtaposed with traditional, classical, utopian usage of those places. For example, Choong-Ki Lee, Lawrence J. Bendle, Yoo-Shik Yoon, and Myung-Jay Kim have argued that some resorts can provide intriguing heterotopic spaces because of the varied emotional, functional, and economic values that can be attached to some thanatourism sites.<sup>25</sup>

Some thanatourist scholars extend this work by highlighting the "post-colonial" dimensions of some of these tourist attractions.<sup>26</sup> This adds an important, often overlooked dimension to park investigations because it reminds us of the legacies of slavery and the heritages of oppression that we have inherited from those who once fought off slave traders on West African coasts and castles.

Critical cultural scholars can benefit from these biopolitical, economic, heterotopic, and postcolonial perspectives when they visit and investigate these thanatopolitical sites, and these approaches gesture toward an intersectional way of unpacking the aesthetic, power, and relational dynamics of places like Parque EcoAlberto. These perspectival approaches are challenging because investigators are asked to pay attention to the contradictions, the polysemic, and the polyvalent ways of conceptualizing the goals of capitalist tourism. This is what helps visitors experience mimetic violence in imaginative and participatory ways, because dark “tourism destinations elicit widely different responses in their visitors, depending on the subject positions that each visitor brings to the site.”<sup>27</sup>

At the outset, let us be clear—we do not argue that all thanatopolitical sites are to be avoided or that visitors should not travel to Parque EcoAlberto. What we will be arguing is that those who become involved in the Caminata Nocturna need to be aware of what Bowman and Pezzullo call the ambiguities and the particularities that go into the cultural production of the “mundane or spectacular.”<sup>28</sup> In this particular case, readers need to be cognizant of the material practices of those who undermine the very metanarratives that they weave every Saturday night in Parque EcoAlberto.

While it seems that interdisciplinary scholars show little hesitancy in utilizing the “dark tourist” theories in their study of popular tourist attractions, not everyone is enamored with this trend. Erika Robb, while understanding the allure of these types of thanatourist attractions, nevertheless pointed out that during some tours the tourist is encouraged to move “from the position of witness into that of victim, and thereby offers a type of pungent bodily experience that gives tourists an engagingly powerful, albeit constructed, perspective on violence.”<sup>29</sup> Michael Bowman and Phaedra Pezzullo, who approached these studies from a different vantage point, worried that by “labeling certain tourists or tourists sites ‘dark,’ an implicit claim is made that there is something disturbing, troubling, suspicious, weird, morbid, or perverse about them, but what exactly that may be remains elusive and ill-defined because no one has assumed the burden of proving it.”<sup>30</sup>

Our study takes up that burden of revealing some of this alleged darkness, and we note how many of those who travel to this park do not hesitate to explain how they feel about the deaths associated with border crossings at the U.S.-Mexico Border. However, they often fail to realize that some of the actors who are a part of these performances undercut their own messages by occupying hybrid subject positions. For example, as we note below, some of the very same “guides” in the park who give speeches about staying in Mexico spend many months working in places like Tucson or Los Angeles. Similarly, those who are versed in U.S. English and play the roles of border agents tend to be the U.S.-born sons and daughters of Hñähñú migrants—some are college students in U.S. institutions who enjoy some of the benefits denied to their parents—who were either deported or who chose to return to Hidalgo.

Some of the visitors to Parque EcoAlberto who pay to participate in the night hikes may talk about how much they have learned from the Hñähñú, but they seemed to have missed the cultural landscapes and the material situations that continue to dehumanize those who play act as they celebrate their escape from *la migra*.

With this in mind, we continue our critical analysis by providing an overview of what some say motivated those who wanted to build this park in Hidalgo.

### The Initial Formation of Parque EcoAlberto

For many of those who live near this park, all of this thanatopolitics has helped save the local economies, and, as noted above, the money raised from La Caminata, along with other park activities like boating trips and rock climbing, is shared evenly among members of the local community. By 2014, Parque EcoAlberto was being touted as a “Mexican eco-tourism” site that was celebrating its tenth anniversary.<sup>31</sup> Environmentalists who visit EcoAlberto can take part in rappelling exercises or they can visit hot springs, but the simulated border crossing remains the main attraction.

Since the inception of the park in 2004, thousands of Mexicans, Europeans, Asians, and North Americans have flocked to this site, and as one of the guides explains: “Most people come out of curiosity. We tell them we do not want it to be an adventure but a way to raise consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> A thanatopolitical curiosity regarding what stands in the path of border crossers thus becomes a didactic opportunity. Members of mainstream and alternative presses constantly interview many of those who work at Parque EcoAlberto, and they often agree on the dominant message that needs to be conveyed to the outside world. Mari-bel Garcia, one of the park’s administrators, was quite explicit when she told *PBS*, our “objective is to stop the immigration that exists among our citizens, particularly from the state of Mexico to the U.S.”<sup>33</sup>

At first glance, even those who comment on some of the dark features of Parque EcoAlberto understand some of the aesthetics, the adrenalin-rush, or the pedagogy that is all mixed up in some of these fascinating performances. A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* explained some of the dark features of this intriguing site:

Gunshots ring out and sirens shriek, mixed with the ragged breath of muddy, panting humans. Suddenly, the full moon sweeping the ground like a searchlight reveals a disturbing scene: A group of illegal immigrants is being handcuffed and led away by U.S. Border Patrol agents. . . . The spectacle unfolding here isn’t an actual border crossing attempt but a live simulation-adventure that attempts to give participants a taste of what it’s like for the thousands of Mexican and other Latin American undocumented migrants to try and enter the promised land of el norte.<sup>34</sup>

Reed Johnson characterized the Caminata Nocturna as a simulation that was a combination of “obstacle course, sociology lesson and PG-rated family outing.”<sup>35</sup>

Granted, raising awareness about the trials and tribulations of indigenous communities like the Hñähñú who work at Parque EcoAlberto is a laudable goal. There is little doubt that this park has become a key revenue stream for those who live in the municipality of Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, Mexico.<sup>36</sup> What we are concerned about are the ways that the Caminata Nocturna appears to be sending a simplistic—and yet highly resonant message—that those who truly want to free themselves from economic want, or those who want to raise their self-esteem, need to experience some of the difficulties of those who tried, and died, as they struggled to confront the border patrols and other forces at the U.S.-Mexico border.

There is a surreal and voyeuristic aspect to these performances that threatens to trivialize the actual dangers that confront those who risk their lives in the pursuit of a better life.

These may have been some of the motivations of those who built this park, but mass media outlets contextualized the *Caminata Nocturna* in very different ways. It is important that we provide a critique of these mass-mediated representations before we discuss the experiential, performative nature of this phantasmagoric night walk.

### **Anything But a Typical Night in Disneylandia: An Experiential Account of La Caminata Nocturna**

As noted earlier, for approximately US\$20 tourists who visit this park can spend a Saturday night interacting with local community members who play various roles in this complex simulation.<sup>37</sup> The usual route takes people along the banks of the Tula River, and the group of 40–50 participants treks through cow pastures and ancient Indian burial grounds. Part of the excitement of this imaginative, make-believe transborder odyssey has to do with the constant pursuit of the participants by the border guards who are constantly barking out commands about the need to surrender.<sup>38</sup>

One of the authors participated in La Caminata Nocturna on August 2, 2014. That author-participant experienced what might be thought of as the night-hike performative script, where the park performers provided an example of what Erika Robb has called a “narrative and event-based view of violence.”<sup>39</sup> At the very outset, this individual was told that the hike would take from 2 to 3 hours, and he was also informed that he was going to get wet and that it would be cold.

The author-participant who took this night hike came to Mexico with a backpack, a laptop, a camera phone, running shoes, and a point-of-view flash camcorder that was strapped around his forehead. The author-participant spent 3 to 4 days in Mexico City before departing for El Alberto. Prior to making the trip to the remote town of El Alberto, he did a fair amount of reading about the park, the community, and the hike—mostly from Spanish-language, Mexican media sources. He suspected that many of the tourists were *capitalinos* or *chilangos*—urban Mexicans from Mexico City or Mexico State—and that many of the issues that were brought up during the night-hike narrative had to do with indigeneity, class, and sociopolitical injustice. In other words, the issues of immigration that were the dominant theme of discussion could be viewed by the critic-participant as tangential to the larger issues of solidarity and social justice that the Hñähñús sought to communicate to their empowered *compatriotas*. This suspicion was confirmed in two ways.

First of all, this was confirmed after speaking to some members of the author-participant’s group that included approximately 40 of 50 attendees. The visiting author was one of three people that were not from Mexico City or Mexico State. The other two were American journalists. Second, during the night hike, the author met a man dressed in traditional Hñähñú garments, and he heard him aggressively addressing a group of privileged college students as he discussed the treatment that Indians received when they visited cities like Pachuca, Puebla, Toluca, and Mexico City. The Hñähñú man described the way in which Indians were humiliated and made to feel inferior when they traveled to nearby urban centers, and all of this provided a darker, contrapuntal reading of the performance that



underscored the wide range of embodied aspects of the park that were often covered by mainstream media outlets. As far as the author-participant was concerned, in that eventful moment, it was clear that for at least some of the tourists and performers, immigration had stopped being the main focus of discussion, and that a more intricate tapestry was being woven by some of the crew at Parque EcoAlberto.

On that particular Saturday night, the hike took about 5 hours. This is because everyone on the hike had to stick together, and one of the authors learned why solidarity was such an important part of the park's message. Although the hike was long, the participating author did not believe that members of his group ever ran more than a kilometer. Furthermore, the hike was filled with strategic stops. Some of these stops were staged as moments when visiting tourists were told that *la migra* (or some other threat) was nearby. In reality, the *polleros* were working with their *migra* counterparts at orchestrating and executing a perfect performance, and the stops provided the visitors with the chance to see some of the darker features of this mimetic violence—complete with references and gestures toward the war on drugs—narcoviolence and femicide. For example, the participating author recalled one moment when the leader of his group of migrants, a Hñähñú woman who went by the alias La Reina del Sur, was executed. A band of *narcos* approached the author and his group as they hid in the darkness of an enormous tree. There were about 20 spectators/migrants and the *narcos* asked for La Reina del Sur, cursing and firing blanks (which were as loud as live rounds) into the air. Every time a shot was fired the participating author imagined a dead migrant, pictured a dead maquiladora employee, or thought about a dead student in his native Chihuahua.

At the beginning of this particular excursion, the participating author and the rest of his group had been instructed not to tell anyone about the identity of their leader, or *coyote*. What this mimetic gesture was trying to imitate is a common border crossing practice, during which “real” *coyotes* (who charge high prices to smuggle migrants into the United States) were often sought after by criminal organizations and law enforcement alike. In the case of the author-participant, the leader was La Reina del Sur. When the performing *narcos* during the night hike found her, they dragged her by her long hair. She kicked her western boots on the ground, kicking up dust as she was dragged into the darkness of the forest. The tourists on the hike heard her scream, begging for mercy. Once she was out of sight, and after the attention of the author's group was riveted by a disturbed silence, they all heard a gunshot in the night—and the screaming ceased.

The author-participant's group continued on—running across a wobbly rope bridge and running through a narrow but long tunnel where roots, unperceivable to the naked eye, hit everyone in the face as they passed. Finally, they came to a hill that overlooked a dirt road. They hid behind bushes, and El Commander, the new *pollero*, told the group that that a pick-up truck would speed them down the dirt road. Members of the group were told that they were to jump into the bed of the truck. When the truck came over the hill, 12 participants ran down, but before they could make it to the truck three border patrol vehicles appeared and the fake border patrol agents arrested the author-participant's group. An interrogation followed that provided an illustration of what Britta Knudsen has called

the activated feelings and memories that can come from reenactments that allow the “visitors’ bodies” to serve as *loci*, that allow for combinations of aesthetic readings and participation observation.<sup>40</sup>

The author-participant was pushed over the hood of an SUV and the questions came from a loud speaker. The most memorable and traumatic lines were:

Q: Where are you from?

A: Mexico

Q: You’re too white to be Mexican.

The author-participant had never thought of himself as white, but he was forced to acknowledge that he had certain privileges in other contexts. As the author was being put in the back of the border patrol van (part of the simulation), he saw the face of the border patrol agent who called him *white* over a speaker. He was just as dark-skinned as the author, and at that point the author-participant started to make assumptions about the interrogator: maybe he also migrated to the United States, illegally, maybe he experienced extreme forms of oppression and racism (including racism from persons of the same race, nationality, or ethnicity), and maybe he was ultimately deported. Maybe these park performances allowed him to reenact those traumatic experiences—this may be the unique and imaginative place where he gets to tell someone of privilege that they are privileged. Unfortunately, this interrogator was one of the volunteers the author-participant would not see again during his stay in Parque EcoAlberto.

Instead of being taken into an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) cell,<sup>41</sup> the author was blindfolded and then taken back to the cabins of Parque EcoAlberto, where the torch ceremony would soon begin. The author’s group was told to find round stones and think of all the evils of the world—apathy, indifference, corruption—and then they were asked to place all that negative energy into this stone and launch it into the river. At that point, the group was told they needed to take off their blindfolds. As they took off their blindfolds, the author-participant got to see what almost all other tourists got to view—the canyon-side lit by dozens of torches. Although this was a moving experience for the participant-author, he had to admit that he was not able to stop thinking about the consumer experience. Here, in the middle of the Hñähñú wilderness, *middle-class* citizens were told that they paid to take part in a fun, safe, and educational simulation—a simulation that raises awareness among Mexicans.

At this point, we would argue that the stone-throwing event provides an example of what Professor McAlister has called the collection of “personal and intimate fragments of memory” that can haunt us and trigger recollections of violence.<sup>42</sup> The collecting of stones may mean that some of the tourists who come to Parque EcoAlberto can shed some of the (white) guilt that they carry—they can participate in the night hike and feel as if they can be one with their Mexican brethren—and, for a moment, that feeling is real. But does this feeling translate into acts that resonate beyond these mountains?

Baudrillard describes Disneyland as serving the function of presenting the unreal and make-believe within its walls while the real remains outside.<sup>43</sup> In other words, Disneyland

is presented as belonging to or addressing the realm of the imaginary, while simultaneously Disneyland presents the world outside as *the real world*, when it would be more appropriate to refer to, in this case, Los Angeles (and by proxy a generalized U.S. capitalist culture) as hyperreal. Disneyland is used to present the argument that the approach to reality should no longer just be a matter of uncloaking the ideologies that blind us to truth or reality but also needs to involve critique that understands signs and referents as participating in simulations. Furthermore, this understanding or approach to reality implodes signs and referents, creating dissonance that only reinforces simulations as present but, oddly, unnoticed.

In the case of EcoAlberto, what the park and mass representations conceal and what the park presents are slightly different. First, the park aims to hide the artifice of the place as they invite visitors to forget that they are in a simulacrum. It not only asks its visitors to respect verisimilitude or *veritas* (to obey their respective guides—called *coyotes* or *polleros*), but it relies on visitors' willingness to believe. If the park represents a borderland where rape, mass murder (particularly of South and Central American immigrants<sup>44</sup> and particularly of women,<sup>45</sup> known as *feminicidios*<sup>46</sup>), theft, extortion, kidnapping, and deportation occurs (all of these are performed during *la caminata*), then the visitor is to believe that border crossers are themselves to blame for their illegal crossings. This is not how the world outside of the park is, because there are other structural and material forces at play here, including transglobal economic conditions.

However, unlike Baudrillard's Disneyland, the message of the park is the opposite message—this is exactly how the world outside of the park *is*, if not worse.

### Typical Contextualizations and Mediated Coverage of the Caminata Nocturna in Anglo-American and Mexican Outlets

Parque EcoAlberto is often described as an odd yet magnificent experience by *capitalinos*—that is, citizens of Mexico City—but this has not prevented this park from attracting the attention of audiences who wonder about this “simulation.”<sup>47</sup> The word and the image are sutured together as documentarians and others have tried to contextualize for viewers what is going on at Parque EcoAlberto,<sup>48</sup> and *ABC News*, the *BBC*,<sup>49</sup> *Vice*, and *Even Oddity Central*<sup>50</sup> have uploaded YouTube videos that put on display some of the theatrics that entice so many to run from *la migra*. One skeptical journalist commented about how tourists get to pay admissions fees so that they can “be chased, shot at, and verbally abused.”<sup>51</sup> Fake drug smugglers and border patrol guards fire blanks and bring along leashed dogs as a part of the performance, but we contend that the surreal lines that supposedly exist between real and imagined geographies become blurred if one thinks about the significations that swirl around this tourist attraction.

Earlier in this article, we hinted at some of the hidden, ideological subtexts, economic relationships, and ethnic tensions that are a part of the heterotopic spaces of Parque EcoAlberto, but little of this is covered in most Anglo-American commentaries about this facility. While some pundits comment on the commodified nature of the tour and the performances of deterrence that are presented on Saturday nights, not everyone knows what to make of this place. One reporter for the *New York Times* remarked that the “idea of tourists aping

illegal immigrants can seem crass, like Maria Antoinette playing peasant on the grounds of Versailles.”<sup>52</sup> Contrast that statement with the claims of Álvarez, one of the organizers of these night hikes, who averred that even stunned visitors have learned some key pedagogical lessons: “They learn to value the liberty they have in their own countries, that they don’t have to run and be chased in their own lives.”<sup>53</sup>

All of this transnational, mass-mediated coverage that circulated between 2004 and 2014 ensured that Parque EcoAlberto would become a site of contestation as Mexican government officials, international academics, filmmakers, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), tourists, and members of the local community debated about this place. Ella Morton, for example, would write in June 2014 that some of the attraction “may seem in questionable taste,” but she argued that the Caminata Nocturna, and the park in general, allowed the Hñähñú to “create jobs, keep the younger generations engaged, and prevent people from leaving to pursue the American dream.”<sup>54</sup>

Was the Caminata Nocturna really about the moral obligations of Mexicans and the prevention of a form of economic drain? Were performers conducting these night tours so they could give their energies to their own communities so that this region and Mexico could become great? Or were these night hikes being used to “pacify indigenous people whose land” was being trespassed on by tourists?<sup>55</sup> At least some members of the press understand the subversive nature of some of these theatrics.

Part of the advertising success of Parque EcoAlberto has to do with the word-of-mouth campaigns and media coverage that lets potential visitors know that this dark tourism attracts members of different socioeconomic classes. For example, Corey Adwar of *Business Insider* characterized this as a “bizarre” Mexican park that allowed groups of middle-class salespersons to use the facility as a participatory event that served as a corporate team-building event. “This is the Mexican telenovela version of the border crossing, a dramatic reenactment,” remarked James Spring, as he described the Mexican sales personnel who went on one hike as “totally freaked out.”<sup>56</sup> One tourist admitted that she was “stressed because we’ve been running so much” and you have to “watch yourself with all of these cactus spines and plants.”<sup>57</sup>

At first glance, one might think that the dominant, overarching message of the Caminata Nocturna was fairly obvious and benign—border crossings are dangerous affairs, so tourists need to realize that they need to appreciate their own freedom, stay home, and become a part of the nationalist communities who are willing to help revitalize Mexico’s economy. Yet interestingly enough, there have been some conservative media outlets in the United States and in Mexico that treat Caminata Nocturna as if this was an activity that *actually helped with the “illegal” training and preparation* of would-be border crossers. In other words, they were confusing mimetic violence with actual violence.

One tour guide working at the Parque EcoAlberto, Julian García, admits that he himself has crossed the “real” U.S.-Mexican border four or five times, and he expressed some surprise when he hears that some onlookers argue that Caminata Nocturna is providing training for would-be border crossers. García tries to answer these critics by noting the arduous nature of these night hikes, and he insists that this simulation is meant to discourage migration.<sup>58</sup> What García failed to mention is that many of the villagers still spend part of their year working undocumented in places like Las Vegas, Nevada, or Tempe, Arizona.<sup>59</sup>

There is no doubt that many press outlets recognize that the Caminata Nocturna plays a vital role in maintaining the precarious economic health of this local village whose former population of about 2,500 was “decimated by migration to the United States.”<sup>60</sup> El Alberto is regarded by many as an isolated region, where illiterate populations do their best to survive. El Alberto was once a local farm economy that depended on crops of tomatoes, corn, and chiles for a living, but when Mexico’s farming sector went into decline, so did the fortunes of these residents of Hidalgo. Many lost hope of getting the type of economic freedom that would provide them with electricity, telephone systems, sewer systems, and roads.<sup>61</sup>

To complicate matters, since the late 1990s, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement exacerbated problems when small farmers were now having to compete with less labor-intensive industrial farming.<sup>62</sup> We contend that few in the mainstream press were willing to dig deep and find out some of the historical, or colonial, reasons why the Hñähñú live in poverty in the first place.

The constant message that many Anglo-Americans wanted to hear was the deterrent effect that this tourist site was having on northern migrations. Sara Gates, for example, explained in 2012 that more than 100 residents of El Alberto—an estimated one eighth of the town’s population—are employed by the Caminata Nocturna so that tourists can get the “illegal” experience without having to face any of the existential dangers that confront those who might lose their lives during actual border crossings. She noted that during a typical Saturday night trek dozens of villagers help orchestrate the show.<sup>63</sup>

From a materialist standpoint, some of this rhetoric makes perfect economic sense. By the end of the twentieth century, Hidalgo had emerged as the Mexican state with the second highest rate of growth of out-migration from Mexico to the United States.<sup>64</sup> By using the Caminata Nocturna as a way of commenting on the deterrence of Northern migration out of regions like El Alberto, Mexicans could play on the fantasies of foreigners and others who wished to believe that freedom meant restricting some transglobal migration.

For those who shared these geopolitical imaginations, it did not hurt that this also looked like it was a park that helped with the preservation of one’s cultural heritage and one’s national identity. The rhetorics associated with deterring migrations have their own antecedent genres, and the tour guides working at this park were tapping into some texts that had their own sedimented, figurative genealogies, as evidenced by some of the commentary about the “failure of roots” that contributed to the migration that became a part of the Bracero Program (1942 to 1964).<sup>65</sup> Census statistics show that before the inauguration of Caminata Nocturna, El Alberto’s population had dropped by more than half between 2000 and 2005, but since 2010 the population had grown to 834.<sup>66</sup>

At least from a neoliberal vantage point, the Caminata Nocturna looked like a resounding success.

### **What Is So Dark about the Caminata Nocturna?**

From a postcolonial perspective, Parque EcoAlberto provides a venue that allows the Hñähñús to masquerade as obedient Mexican citizens, individuals who practice a form of strategic essentialism<sup>67</sup> as they talk and act as if they understand the edicts that come from Mexico

City. The Caminata Nocturna, after all, is organized as a patriotic night hike that puts on display the dread and horror that awaits those who have the temerity to forget about the importance of national solidarity. While some of the most overtly political messages of these performances are binary—the yelling of *coyotes* encouraging their wards to run, “*vamos corriendo*,” versus the pursuing Border Patrol guards who constantly shout out that they know where the tourists are hiding—some of the ideology swirling around here is more veiled. For example, on one night, a “*coyote*” by the name of Simon was addressing about 40 students from a private school in Mexico City, and he explained in Spanish: “Tonight we’re going to talk about migration. But for us it isn’t just being rhetorical, but rather the opposite. Because we have endured, we have suffered, of hunger, thirst, injustice, heat, cold, we have suffered from everything.”<sup>68</sup> This may be a little vague, given it is not always clear who is doing the enduring. The implied “we” could mean the border crossers themselves, all of those who identify with the suffering of the Hñähñú, or Mexican nationalists who band together to prevent further suffering from border crossings.

Homi Bhabha, in his studies of identity politics and mimicry, has written about hybrid identities in which desire and repulsion are a part of politics of recognition in some disparate power relations,<sup>69</sup> and here it is not always clear how participants in the Caminata Nocturna are supposed to characterize the immigrants that move northward. Are they supposed to view them as victims of ethnic, social, and economic discrimination, or are they configured as willful social agents who should know what freedom really means? On one night hike, “Pancho” explained to visitors that being “an immigrant isn’t a source of pride” because they have to “abandon the family, the language, the earth.”<sup>70</sup>

As noted above, at the end of the typical night trek, participants are brought to a bluff where they can see hundreds of lit torches, and each of the torches is supposed to represent one of those who died while trying to cross the U.S. border. Visitors have been described as becoming “sort of misty-eyed” at this point in this dark performance because “these stories are a part of their national heritage,” even though the “reality of it is so far removed from their own lives.”<sup>71</sup> Part carnival, part phantasmagoria, the Caminata Nocturna invites participants to thank their lucky stars.

On these not-so-typical nights, deterrence is the reiterated message. At the end of another walk, Jazmin Arely Moreno Alcazar, over tea and sweet breads, explained in Spanish that she had learned that border crossings were not worth the risks because “if we can’t stand a few hours, we won’t be able to stand for days. Because it’s very ugly.”<sup>72</sup> Many of the organizers of these events, who obviously cannot always quantify the impact that this has on visitors from Mexico City and elsewhere, nevertheless radiate confidence that parks like this can, over time, contribute to the deterrence of migration north.

The experiences of our participant-author show that the Parque EcoAlberto is much more than meets the eye, and it is a contact zone that contains many ruptures, elisions, and reversals that cannot be papered over by those who would contend that the Caminata Nocturna is merely a patriotic or a didactic affair. For example, indigenous Hñähñú populations of Hidalgo are fully aware that this tourist attraction conceals as much as it reveals. They realize that they can strategically critique those who visit this site thinking that they will learn something about law-abiding Mexican nationalists who have little interest in future border crossings. For example, indigenous Hñähñú populations can talk to visiting

tourists from Mexico City about the importance of maintaining Mexican national identities, while they themselves occupy more hybrid and complex subject positions. When they choose to, they can masquerade as loyal Mexican nationalists, and this allows them performatively to unravel some of the essentialist rhetorics that they helped fabricate.

Mainstream presses may want to see this as some progressive, entrepreneurial adventure that puts on display the liberating power of capitalism, but a more critically engaged study of the complexities of this place reveals that those who work at this park are still dependent on those who travel north and send money back home. As we alluded to earlier, many of the same people who give speeches during these night hikes about the need to stay home spend a great deal of time working in the United States and dodging border patrols. Furthermore, some of the workers are U.S. citizens by birth, occupying a hybrid space of dual citizenship or ambiguous loyalties, not to mention their indigenous heritage.

Irony, parody, and mocking are a part of both the *Caminata Nocturna* as well as the commentary that appears in the mainstream and alternative press that builds contextualizations of Parque EcoAlberto. The “real” and the surreal are blurred as various classes and ethnic communities send out contradictory messages about how to cope with actual and “simulated” border crossings.

For the unwary, some of the rhetoric that is presented by the Hñähñú before the night hikes and after the end of the journey is filled with ambiguous commentaries on how deterring movement north can be linked to such issues as migrant rights or labor solidarity. As Reed Johnson explains, the “*Caminata* reflects the assumption that poor, desperate migrants have a right to seek work in foreign lands, an attitude shared by most Mexicans, who adamantly oppose extension of the U.S. border wall.” However, he goes on to note that these tourist performances are presented in ways that seem to be “more of a homage to migrants than an overt political statement.”<sup>73</sup>

The more that we watched this layering of nationalistic and labor-oriented narratives, the more we realized that the park was also serving as a vehicle for *critiquing* the practices that take place at more than one border. Many of the Hñähñú, the tourists, and journalists who comment on these night hikes realize that these complex performances are conveying many dreadful stories about the material and the symbolic dimensions of *several borders* and their thanatopolitics. Alfonso Najera, for example, was willing to admit that visitors to Parque EcoAlberto would hear about border suffering so that they would learn not to dream of northward migrations, but he also sensed something else. On “the other side,” Najera explained, “we Mexicans aren’t the best example of good hosts toward foreigners. [At] the southern border, which is the border we almost never look at, we Mexicans treat the Central Americans very badly.”<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

We have no doubt that many promoters and supporters of the Parque EcoAlberto will continue to act as if this tourist attraction is innocently presenting some innocuous and uncontested monolithic message about the need to deter Northern migration. Sergio Mendieta, a school teacher from the State of Mexico, explained that he thought it was “part of our culture” and that this embodied experience was something important to know.<sup>75</sup>

Natalie Álvarez similarly noted that the aesthetics of the spectacular night scenes allow the Hñähñú community to turn the “crisis of migration into ritual,” one that some of the guides hope will “reduce migration to an optional right, rather than a necessity.”<sup>76</sup>

Yet, what this study reveals are the ways that dark tourist sites, like the Parque EcoAlberto, can serve more subversive or voyeuristic functions. They allow those with polyvalent interests and complex motives to craft cultural identities as they engage in social imaginaries and performative practices that allow for contrapuntal readings. For example, indigenous members of the Hñähñú community allow visitors to get a sense of some of the excitement, dread, and dangers that confront those who are willing to take the risk of crossing the Mexican-U.S. border, but they themselves can travel North and send money back home to their families.

The Hñähñú sometimes acknowledge the transgressive nature of their actions, and, at times, they indicate that they wish that they could work legally in the United States. Some argue that President Obama’s immigration policies are too complicated and cumbersome. Delfino Santiago, a Hñähñú and one of the overseers working at Parque EcoAlberto, remarked that he paid U.S. taxes and understood the laws, and yet he was bothered by the fact that Americans did not allow “us to become citizens.”<sup>77</sup> During other interviews with reporters, Santiago apparently revealed that in spite of the fact that he served as a type of manager of Parque EcoAlberto, he was on a kind of “sabbatical from his landscape job in Las Vegas.”<sup>78</sup> This commentary was referencing the fact that many residents of El Alberto feel obligated to provide a year’s service to their community, and that working at the parks fulfills that obligation.

In sum, the disconnect between the *praxis* of some of this movement by the Hñähñú and the rhetoric that circulates before and after the arduous night hikes has added to the suspicions of those who already had their doubts about the place. Foreign observers who pay attention to the workers in the park can point out that all of this movement to the “north” just provides evidence that some conservative pundits were right—the park is actually a boot camp that is really a training ground for Central Americans and Mexicans who want to improve their lot by migrating. However, the difference between the real and the simulated is stark—would a desperate Central American migrant spend \$20 on a simulated practice—having already crossed several borders? If caught by the fake *migra*, should the simulation include two months of solitary confinement in an ICE cell, and not a cozy cabin?

We dream of the day when the Caminata Nocturna will become a catalytic event that will allow for meaningful critiques of the politics of several borders, where deterrence or solidarity will be discussed in more inclusive ways.

## Notes

- [1] Parque EcoAlberto is located just a 2- to 3-hour drive from Mexico City and more than 700 miles from the U.S. border. As we explain in more detail below, it is a tourist park that provides employment for many of the Hñähñú, the indigenous communities who live in that region. For some 10 years various press outlets have written or blogged about this site, and a filmmaker, Jamie Meltzer, has produced a film, *La Caminata* (the hike), that allows viewers to get a glimpse



of a pedagogical site that allegedly helps with the deterrence of those who might be interested in trying to illegally cross into the United States.

- [2] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); René Girard, "Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism," *Berkshire Review* 14 (1979): 9–19.
- [3] Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- [4] Erika M. Robb, "Violence and Recreation: Vacationing in the Realm of Dark Tourism," *Anthropology and Humanism* 34, no. 10 (2009): 56.
- [5] Robb, "Violence and Recreation," 51–52. At the outset of this article let us admit that critical scholars may have some ambivalent feelings as they study the arguments of those who either complain about this park or those who celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit behind this venture. Others, who enjoy reading about neoliberal capitalism, will see nothing wrong with having local indigenous communities make money from middle-class or wealthy visitors who travel hundreds of miles to get the "border-crossing" experience. This all raises the question of whether there are better ways of representing the plight of South Americans, Central Americans, Mexicans, and others who have to cope with the hegemonic powers of those who control several borders.
- [6] Zitlali Sánchez, "Turismo negro: Parque EcoAlberto, turismo negro en Ixmiquilpan Hidalgo, simulacro o realidad del fenómeno migratorio, México 2011–2012," *Turismo Negro*, November 16, 2011, <http://zitlali-turismonegro.blogspot.com>.
- [7] The coauthor who visited this site is not a member of the Hñähñú community. By U.S. standards, he is a Mexican of indigenous ancestry—Rarámuri to be specific. By U.S. standards he is *mestizo* (in Mexico the word *mestizo* is also part of a colonial caste system) and, therefore, not wholly indigenous and not exactly White. To reiterate, these dimensions are particularly important, and they will be addressed in more detail near the end of the article.
- [8] Britta T. Knudsen, "Deportation Day: Live History Lesson," *Museum* 63, no. 1–2 (2011): 109–134.
- [9] See Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 33–40.
- [10] Philip R. Stone, "A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Toward a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions, and Exhibits," *Tourism* 54, no. 2 (2006): 145.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 145–146.
- [12] Emma Willis, *Theatricality, Dark Tourism and Ethical Spectatorship* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).
- [13] Miguel Vatter, "Eternal Life and Biopower," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 10, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 217–249, doi: 10.1353/ncr.2010.0035.
- [14] Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, *An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 137.
- [15] Britta Timm Knudsen, "Thanatourism: Witnessing Difficult Pasts," *Tourist Studies* 11 (2011): 56, doi: 10.1177/1468797611412064.
- [16] Robb, "Violence and Recreation," 56.
- [17] For example, some defenders of dark tourism studies admonish us to remember that we have a responsibility to look, and to study, all sorts of administrative atrocities, murders, etc., so that we "never again" have to witness some of the thanatopolitical practices of the past.
- [18] Joan Farber McAlister, "Collecting the Gaze: Memory, Agency and Kinship in the Women's Jail Museum, Johannesburg," *Women's Studies in Communication* 36 (2013): 4–5.

- [19] Mona Friedrich and Tony Johnston, "Beauty versus Tragedy: Thanatourism and the Memorialisation of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 11, no. 4 (2013): 302–320, doi: 10.1080/14766825.2013.852565.
- [20] A. V. Seaton, "Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis To Thanatourism," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (1996): 234–244.
- [21] Peter Slade, "Gallipoli Thanatourism: The Meaning of Anzac," *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 4 (2004): 779–794, 779, doi: 10.1016/S0160-7383(03)00025-2.
- [22] Stuart Murray, "Thanatopolitics: Reading in Agamben: A Rejoinder to Biopolitical Life," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 203–207, 206.
- [23] John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000), 58.
- [24] Thomas Blom, "Morbid Tourism—A Postmodern Market Niche with an Example from Althorp," *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift—Norwegian Journal of Geography* 54 (2000): 29–36, doi: 10.1080/002919500423564.
- [25] Choong-Ki Lee, Lawrence J. Bendle, Yoo-Shik Yoon, and Myung-Jay Kim, "Thanatourism or Peace Tourism: Perceived Value at a North Korean Resort from an Indigenous Perspective," *International Journal of Tourism Research* 14, no. 1 (2012): 71–90, doi: 10.1002/jtr.836.
- [26] Robert Shandley, Tazim Hamal, and Aniela Tanase, "Location Shooting and the Filmic Destination: Transylvanian Myths and the Post-Colonial Tourism Enterprise," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 4, no. 3 (2006): 137–158.
- [27] Robb, "Violence and Recreation," 52.
- [28] Mark Bowman and Phaedra Pezzullo, "What's So 'Dark' about 'Dark Tourism'? Death, Tours, and Performance," *Tourist Studies* 9, no. 3 (2009): 199.
- [29] Robb, "Violence and Recreation," 56.
- [30] Bowman and Pezzulo, "What's So Dark," 190.
- [31] Ella Morton, "Parque EcoAlberto: Home of the Illegal Border-Crossing Tourism Experience," *Slate*, June 20, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas\\_obscura/2014/06/20/caminata\\_nocturna\\_at\\_parque\\_ecoalberto\\_is\\_an\\_illegal\\_border\\_crossing\\_experience.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas_obscura/2014/06/20/caminata_nocturna_at_parque_ecoalberto_is_an_illegal_border_crossing_experience.html). For more on the significance of the 10th anniversary, see Arturo González, "Parque Eco Alberto Festejará 10th aniversario de Caminata Nocturna," *Via Libre*, last modified July 18, 2014, <http://www.diariovia libre.com.mx/parque-eco-alberto-festajara-10o-aniversariode-caminata-nocturna/>.
- [32] Sara Gates, "'La Caminata' Gives Tourists A Simulated Illegal Border-Crossing Experience," *The Huffington Post*, last modified September 21, 2012, para. 4, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/09/caminata-illegal-border-crossing\\_n\\_1866023.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/09/caminata-illegal-border-crossing_n_1866023.html).
- [33] Maribel Garcia, quoted in Irena Zhorov and Fronteras, "Mexican Amusement Park Offers Fake Border Crossing Attraction," *PBS Newshour*, last modified June 24, 2013, para. 4, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/fake-border-crossing-is-amusement-park-attraction/>.
- [34] Reed Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers Illegal Immigration Simulation Adventure," *The Los Angeles Times*, last modified May 24, 2008, <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexicoamericas/la-et-border24-2008may24-story.html#page=1>.
- [35] *Ibid.*, para. 3.
- [36] For those who might be tempted to visit this park, Eco Alberto has put together its own web page that helps potential visitors plan their tours. See Eco Alberto, *Caminata Nocturna*, 2014, <http://www.ecoalberto.com.mx/CAMINATA.php>.

- [37] Natalie Alvarez, "Fronteras Imaginarias: Theorizing *Fronterizidad* in the Simulated Illegal Border Crossings of Alberto, Mexico," *Journal of Dramatistic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 2011): 24.
- [38] Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers," para. 10.
- [39] Robb, "Violence and Recreation," 52.
- [40] Knudsen, "Deportation Day," 110.
- [41] Ian Urbina and Catherine Rentz explain that ICE cells are controversial solitary confinement cells used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. On an average day, 300 immigrants are kept in solitary confinement—confinement ranging from 15 to over 75 days. These confinements are controversial because detainees are held on civil charges, not criminal charges. Solitary confinement is a practice of punishment, yet detainees in ICE cells are confined "to ensure that they appear for administrative hearings" (para. 4). ICE cells are spaces associated with depression and suicide, and psychiatric experts agree that detainees are "at risk for severe mental harm" (para. 2). For more on ICE cells, see Ian Urbina and Catherine Rentz, "Immigrants Held in Solitary Cells, Often for Weeks," *New York Times*, March 23, 2013, para. 1–4, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/us/immigrants-held-in-solitary-cells-often-for-weeks.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/us/immigrants-held-in-solitary-cells-often-for-weeks.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).
- [42] McAlister, "Collecting the Gaze," 14.
- [43] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983), 25.
- [44] *Borderland Beat*, "Zetas Massacre 72 Illegal Immigrants in San Fernando Tamaulipas," August 26, 2010, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2010/08/zetas-massacre-72-illegalimmigrants-in.html>.
- [45] *Borderland Beat*, "A Nightmare of the Massacre in San Fernando," April 18, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/04/nightmare-of-massacre-in-san-fernando.html>.
- [46] See Michelle Holling, "'So My Name Is Alma, and I'm the Sister of . . .': A Femicidio Testimonio of Violence and Violent Identifications," *Women's Studies in Communication* 37, no. 3 (2014): 313–338.
- [47] Rwddael Argonar Nyrennsen, "Caminata nocturna Parque EcoAlberto," *Las Puertas de Annnwn*. Blog, August 19, 2009, <http://rwddael.blogspot.com/2009/08/caminata-nocturnaparque-ecoalberto.html>.
- [48] Jamie Meltzer, *La Caminata*.
- [49] For more British coverage of the park, see *Daily Mail Reporter*, "Mexican Town Cashes In by Offering Tourists Illegal Border Crossing Experience," *Mail Online*, last modified September 9, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2200689/Mexican-town-cashesoffering-tourists-illegal-border-crossing-experience-Thrill-seekers-chased-dark-wildernessgun-wielding-border-patrol-agents.html>.
- [50] Oddity Central Staff, "Experience Life as Illegal Alien at Mexico's Border-Crossing Theme Park," *Oddity Central*, last modified June 13, 2012, <http://www.odditycentral.com/pics/experience-life-as-an-illegal-alien-at-mexicos-border-crossing-theme-park.html>.
- [51] Morton, "Parque EcoAlberto," para. 1.
- [52] Patrick O'Gilfoil Healy, "Heads Up: Hidalgo, Mexico; Run! Hide! The Illegal Border Crossing Experience," *The New York Times*, last modified February 4, 2007, para. 7, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E02E0DB143FF937A35751C0A9619C8B63>.
- [53] *Ibid.*, para. 30.
- [54] Morton, "Parque EcoAlberto," para. 5.

- [55] Both these sentiments appeared in Donna Westlund, "The Caminata Nocturna is a Simulated Illegal U.S. Border Crossing Event," *Liberty Voice*, last modified March 22, 2014, <http://guardianlv.com/2014/03/the-caminata-nocturna-is-a-simulated-illegal-u-s-border-crossing-event/>.
- [56] Corey Adwar, "This Bizarre Mexican Part Simulates Illegal Border Crossings," *Business Insider*, April 29, 2014, para. 2–4, <http://www.businessinsider.com/mexicos-parqueecoalberto-border-crossings-2014-4>.
- [57] Gates, "La Caminata," para. 9.
- [58] Julian Garcia, quoted in Sara Gates, "'La Caminata' Gives Tourists," para. 13.
- [59] It should come as no surprise that some Arizona journalists could not help writing about the park. Claire Lawton, "La Caminata Theme Park in Mexico Gives Visitors a Chance to 'Cross' a Simulated Border," *Phoenix New Times*, last modified September 11, 2012, [http://blogs.phoenixnewtimes.com/jackalope/2012/09/la\\_caminata\\_simulated\\_border\\_theme\\_park\\_immigration.php](http://blogs.phoenixnewtimes.com/jackalope/2012/09/la_caminata_simulated_border_theme_park_immigration.php).
- [60] Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers," para. 3.
- [61] Maribel Garcia, quoted in Zhorov and Fronteras, "Mexican Amusement Park," para. 6.
- [62] Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers," para. 13.
- [63] Sara Gates, "'La Caminata' Gives Tourists," para. 2.
- [64] Ella Schmidt and Maria Crummet, "Heritage Re-Created: Hidalguenses in the United States and Mexico," in *Indigenous Mexican Migration in the U.S.*, eds. Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado (La Holla, California: Centre for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2004), 403.
- [65] Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York, UP, 2008).
- [66] Gates, "La Caminata," para. 11.
- [67] In her own work, Gayatri C. Spivak critiqued what she called a "positive essentialism" that critics needed to strategically use in visible ways for political interests. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 205.
- [68] Zhorov and Fronteras, "Mexican Amusement Park," para. 1–2.
- [69] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- [70] "Poncho" [Alfonso Martinez], quoted in Patrick O'Gilfoil Healy, "Heads Up: Hidalgo, Mexico; Run! Hide! The Illegal Border Crossing Experience," *The New York Times*, last modified February 4, 2007, para. 10.
- [71] James Spring, quoted in Adwar, "This Bizarre Mexican Park," para. 10.
- [72] Jazmin Arely Moreno Alcazar quoted in Zhorov and Fronteras, "Mexican Amusement Park," para. 19.
- [73] Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers," paragraph 19.
- [74] *Ibid.*, para. 33.
- [75] Sergio Mendieta, quoted in Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers," para. 7.
- [76] Alvarez, "Fronteras Imaginarias," 32.
- [77] Delfino Santiago, quoted in Johnson, "Mexican Town Offers," para. 16.
- [78] Mexican Reporter Staff, "Illegal Border Crossing—for Tourists," *MexicoReporter.com*, last modified May 22, 2008, para. 6, <http://www.mexicoreporter.com/2008/05/22/illegalborder-crossing-for-tourists/>.